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A Reader's Letter evokes replies from members of Sects

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Mr. M., a Protestant who works in a large factory, recently sent me a large parcel. It contained letters which he had received from all over the place. This flood of correspondence was due to the fact that a German mass paper called "Bild" had published an article from a pastor in Eastern Germany dealing with the question "why are the Churches so empty ?" Mr. M. had written a letter in reply to the question, and it had been published by the editor in the correspondence column. It was a genuine Christian witness. But the editor of "Bild" had left that part out and only published the opening paragraph of his letter, in which Mr. M. said that the men who worked with him in his factory often asked him "what is the Church ?" "Why do we need a Church and a God ?" "What is truth ?" It is true, these questions spring from a doubt. "And yet they all contain a longing, a seeking, a questioning, many questions. Who is going to answer them ?"

Who is going to answer them ? It was this question which caused the flood of letters to Mr. M. "For over a week I received a pile of letters every day, and they are still coming in", he said. "In these letters people of widely differing convictions tried to answer this question on the basis of their own religious conviction or view of life, and also offered to help me 'to find the only right way' for the future. If I had not already possessed my own firm faith, this flood of different opinions would have confronted me with the question 'What is truth ?'"

Let us take a look at the letters which Mr. M. received. They come from many different parts of Western Germany, and even from Switzerland. Some are typed, some hand-written, some in an educated

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style, others awkward and ill-expressed. And apart from two letters from members of the Evangelical Church, they are all from members of sects. When these people read the question "What is truth ?" they felt called upon to say "We have the answer !"

There are letters from Neo-Apostolics, who tell Mr. M. "We have new Apostles today !" They refer ironically to the Bible which they regard merely as a collection of dead letters which can never give life. But (they assert) their own Apostles can tell contemporary people "God's word for our time" and give them the Holy Spirit. They talk about the First Apostle and his message and about the Return of Christ in the near future. All those whose lips have been sealed, who follow the message of the Apostles, will then be carried up into heaven, and you should be one of them !" They tell Mr. M. "There is only one answer to all the questions raised in your letter to 'Bild', questions which are troubling the hearts of many people today. Come to a service in the Neo-Apostolic Church ! There you will hear the whole truth in reply to all your questions !"

The medley of letters includes tracts from Seventh Day Adventists, printed matter from the Rosicrucians, from the Unity School of Christianity (a species of Christian Science), from the Church of the Kingdom of God, from the Christian Peace Union, from the Campaign against Nuclear Warfare, and from the Grail Movement. A member of the latter recommends its teachings on the basis of his own experience : "I'm a gardener myself, and I have found full answers to all the questions that people ask, whatever their nation or confession. Let me hold out a helping hand to you. Be of good courage, for I will show you the way to the Light, without attaching yourself to any confession."

Some members of the Ludendorff movement also wrote, and considered it their first duty to open Mr. M.'s eyes. "I should like to speak quite frankly. The great international swindle and all the world wars are deliberately manoeuvred by Rome-Judah. After long enquiry and research the scandalous machinations were disclosed by the late General Ludendorff and his wife... You will receive our paper 'Volkswarte' from which you will learn the naked, bitter truth." Another letter runs, "Your questions show that at last you are beginning to think, and that the faith of the Church in which you have been brought up, and of which you have grown fond, is no help to you. Its ideas are assiduously propagated, but they are wrong. The Christian Jewish priesthood has given the nations the Bible and the personified God 'Jahwe' or 'Jehovah'. That must be clearly recognised. For 30 years the philosopher, Dr. Mathilde Ludendorff, has been working for the enlightenment of humanity. In her works she has written indisputable truths. I advise you to start now and to seek for the truth." The first book that he advised Mr. M. to read is entitled "Salvation from Jesus Christ".

Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly active. They sent a lot of tracts and copies of "Erwachet !" and "Wachtturm". Their letters are extremely wordy. They quote a lot of biblical passages in order to "prove" that they are right. "Open your Bible and read the passages. The Word of God is the source of truth which supplies the answer to all

our questions. If you have any questions, I shall be glad to answer them for you", writes a woman from Wilhelmshaven. Other letters describe a whole panorama of world history, starting with the creation, criticising the Churches, and prophesying Armageddon and the millennium. "As you have probably realised, I am very anxious to help you to worship God in the right way. Finally I give you this advice : study your Bible, learn to know the demands of Jehovah so that you too may attain this new world to the glory of God and to your own salvation."

Other letters attack the "false teachings" of the Church : the Trinity, survival after death, hell, divinity, Christ. Or they recommend : "If you are sincerely and honestly seeking for truth, for the true relation between God and man, for the purpose and aim of human life, then I would earnestly advise you to study the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses. You will then probably have the same experience as ourselves and all the other people who used to jeer, and who did not realise that Jehovah's Witnesses are not just one of the 260 (!) Christian 'sects' which have existed during the past 1600 years but that they are advocates of the pure, undistorted original teaching which Christ and his disciples proclaimed to the people of their time, whose religious ideas were just as misguided then as today." One letter says : "If a Witness of Jehovah knocks at your door, please don't send him away, for he alone can explain to you the truth about God and His purpose, because he is the mouthpiece of the pure teaching of the Bible, as is the will of God."

The letters differ in their origin and content. But they all reveal an absolute conviction : we, the writers of these letters, have found the truth ! It is not to be found anywhere else, and all the other people, especially the Churches, are wrong - false prophets, noxious pests, apostates. This conviction that they possess the truth is so firmly-rooted that they never question it. In these letters there are no more problems - for all the problems have been solved - nor any feeling that one might not oneself be acceptable to God. No, they have the right form of truth, and they are members of the right fellowship, and so everything is settled once and for all.

The letters have something else in common too, however. They contain offers of help, and are often very warm and friendly in inviting Mr. M. to join their own sect or movement. These letters illustrate how active the members of the sects are when they discover someone (even only by reading a letter from him in 'Bild') who gives them the impression that he is a seeker, and that they might therefore succeed in winning him. They are far, far more active than Church-Christians in looking out for people and going after them.

Mr. M., the recipient of all these letters, dit not merely read them. He answered them. He sent every one of them the little leaflet "What wilt thou do with Jesus ?" and the first part of a printed Bible-study course in four parts. He also indicated a biblical passage applicable to the sect in question. To the Neo-Apostolics he sent an

explanatory pamphlet. All the correspondents were disappointed, of course. "A little while ago you sent me the Bible-study course. But I can't imagine how it could help me to understand the Bible", wrote a Witness of Jehovah. They had hoped to win a convert to their own sect, instead of which they discovered that they had to deal with a believing Christian who began to question them and the truths taught in their sect. Many of them replied with enthusiastic expositions of their own beliefs. Many of them called to see him personally. He listened to them, spoke to them of his own faith, and told them that he could distinguish between truth and falsehood. When they left, he gave them the Bible-study course to take home, and continued to pray for them.

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